United Nations E/CN.6/2004/NGO/38

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 January 2004

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-eighth session
1-12 March 2004
Item 3 (c) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and actions in the critical areas of concern and further action and initiatives: the role of men and boys in gender equality

Statement submitted by Federation of Cuban Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

04-22250 (E) 130204

The role of men and boys in the achievement of gender equality should imply an analysis of this category as a social and cultural construction that varies throughout the history and referrers to psychological and cultural features that a society confers to every element of what is considered masculine and feminine.

Gender is a relational, hierarchical, historical and concrete category. It expresses the relationship between men and women regarding to society, the historical relations of power between them, their evolution and how they are seen in concrete and specific contexts.

Gender is also seen as a group of social, political, psychological, judicial and economical characteristics assigned to people in a differentiated way, according to the sex. Sometimes it is said that XXI will be a century that will put again man in a centre of the debate, but not only as it has been so far, but from the masculinity point of view. In this restatement everything is not advantageous in the cultural aspect.

The expropriation women have suffered historically has been more evident, culturally deprived from the right of social leadership, intelligence and sexual enjoyment. For men, to assume what has been assigned for them has also meant a group of expropriations that has been unnoticed in a conscious way, but from the psychological point of view it also has represented a burden.

They have been trained for the risk, the feat, the strength, the competence, the power. The right for a close and tender paternity, the enjoyment of a home has been affected. The limitation for expressing their feelings openly has been affected as well. Many of these features with the time and during the stereotyping process are transforming into a cost on their own health and on the other's one. It has been spoken about the masculine crisis of identity, precisely because men try to change due to the fact women are requesting a different man.

Where do men go in this century then? Gender should not be seen as a dichotomy between women and men. To change these social relationships based on the differences that distinguish the sexes and are used for designing psychological, social, and cultural aspects, entails the deconstruction of many patterns mentioned before and the construction of new ones.

These changes, of course, will not happen just due to new laws, which really can help to produce the change, but this will not be enough. Alternatives for the change should be promoted, not from sexual stereotypes, but from individual and personal potentialities of everyone.

The differentiated education according to the sexes is the first step in the reproduction of sexual stereotypes, a matter that many times is left behind the house

doors. The systems of demands for boys and girls should not be different in terms of responsibilities for both.

Together with the development of policies and programs aimed at striving against stereotypes and the political will from the government, it is necessary to develop a real cultural of equality.

This should be done through a socialized work, understood as a complex and detailed cultural process of incorporating forms of being represented as well as how to value and to behave in the world. This process not only happens in the childhood, but also during the whole live, that is why, different social networks play important roles according to the case, in order to promote the change, stop or prevent it in different life cycles.

The understanding of the gender equality should include aspects such as: the socio-historical changes, the process of socialization within the family, the economical production, power and authority, sexuality and emotions, and communication.

For the Federation of Cuban Women it is important to change and transcend these socio-cultural constructions that separate men and women, and try to find everything that joins us and we could share as human beings. The efforts for achieving gender equality is at the same time a challenge for a country like ours that has set out every time higher levels of cultural development for people and the formation of human being values, like the equality of rights, opportunities and possibilities for women and men, among others.

The roles to be played by women and men in the families and in society that we are building, the ethic and moral values that guide our behaviours and attitudes, the concepts and ideas we defend, to go forward with our social project, come through a process of redefining gender roles - an essential aspect within the battle of ideas. Preparing women to assume their responsibilities in all spheres, including administrative and political management, and continue developing all abilities and human qualities in men, both for social work as well as in the exercise of a responsible and conscious paternity to have better fathers and mothers, better human beings, are some of the strategic objectives in our society.